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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2015

Taking the plunge

Dozens of people are jumping into Niagara's waters this cold season, and one experts recommends caution.
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Holiday health

Do you know where to turn for Niagara medical services during the holidays, or for that matter any time of the year?
Page 13

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A holiday feast for the community



FRANK RUZYCKI
POSTMEDIA NETWORK
Landy O'Donnell, right, serves Christmas dinner at Port Colborne High School. See story and photos on page 2.

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UPFRONT

■ CHRISTMAS

Community comes together

FRANKI IKEMAN
Postmedia Network

Their message was simple as they welcomed people into the cafeteria at Port Colborne High School.

"Don't be alone for Christmas."

That's why the volunteers and community members have been running the Port Colborne community Christmas dinner for 19 years.

"We're not running this as a hand-out, we're running this as a social gathering," said volunteer and organizer Larry Olm.

The free dinner was held Christmas Day about lunch time and saw approximately 200 free meals given to those who needed them — both

at the cafeteria and through deliveries and takeout.

The annual effort is run by volunteers who would choose to give back to their community on a day many cherish with family at home.

Denis Bergeron was busy volunteering his time in the kitchen. When asked why he enjoys the annual meal, he chuckled up.

"This is why ... I've got way more than they'll ever have. If I can't give ... I'm not doing Jesus's work," Bergeron said. "Christmas can be celebrated any time with my family."

He was one of about 30 volunteers who showed up to make sure everyone had a nice meal on Christmas.

"There's too many seniors

and too many people alone on Christmas Day," said Jack O'Neill, volunteer and organizer, and president of Friends Over 55 Recreation Centre. "It's awful for a senior to sit there alone and look at four walls, so we decided to say, 'Don't be alone, we have this for you.'"

People young and old showed up to share the holiday with friends, family, neighbours and strangers. Songs were sung, food was eaten and gifts were given.

"Everyone's going to leave with a gift and a full belly, that's what Christmas is all about," Olm said.

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PHOTOS BY FRANKI IKEMAN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

From left, Cathy Olm, Brenda Smyth and MP Vance Badawey serve Christmas dinners at Port Colborne High School on Friday.



Volunteers pack meals to be delivered to homes for Christmas at Port Colborne High School.



Volunteers serve Christmas dinner at Port Colborne High School.

Mark Lalama Trio
with Marc Jordan
& Whitney Pea

JAN 3

The Tartan Terrors

JAN 25

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& The Beautiful Gypsies

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St. Catharines

LOCAL NEWS

■ **CHARITY:** About \$8,000 raised for Red Roof Retreat



PHOTOS BY DON FRASER, POSTMEDIA NETWORK

About 30 brave swimmers took part in the 40th annual Penguin Dip in Niagara-on-the-Lake on Boxing Day afternoon. Money was raised at the event for Red Roof Retreat.

Penguins enjoy milder dip

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network

Owen Bjorgan agreed the only thing more wrying than a Speedo is a dunk into the frigid waters of Lake Ontario.

Bjorgan, 23, was marking his fourth Penguin Dip in Niagara-on-the-Lake on Saturday. He was sporting a dark Speedo — and no other skin cover — as he and about 30 others waited in a heated trailer for the famous Penguin Club swim.

"The key to this is to remember it is supposed to be fun and for a good

cause," he said.

"And everybody will get out alive and we'll all celebrate on the other side," Bjorgan added with a laugh. "So it's a bit of short-term pain and long-term gain for everybody else."

Now into its 40th year, the Penguin Dip also served as a fundraiser for Red Roof Retreat.

Red Roof is a local camp that provides respite and recreational programs for children, youths and young adults with special needs and their families in Niagara.

Money raised in advance reached almost \$8,000 in pledges, and more

was raised at the dip.

Rules require three wades into the water of Lake Ontario, a quick dip, another with splashing and silly stunts and a third, gruelling slow walk backward.

Swimmers become club members by participating in three separate years.

Lifelong town resident Carol Dyck, 54, was among dozens to take in the spectacle of splashes and shrieks.

"Most of the people here are townies, and I just live down the street," said Dyck.

"It's about all of them getting

together and it's a great event."

Afterward, volunteer Chris Bjorgan, Owen's uncle, remarked on the 6°C air temperature, much warmer than previous years.

"It's more fun when it's cold," he said, shivering nonetheless after his plunge. "There's no real challenge here."

"There's two ways you can get your water here — cold and wet or cold and ice-hard," said Bjorgan.

"This was just cold and wet."

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Twitter: @don_standard

■ **POLAR DIPS**

Be cautious when taking the icy plunge

FRANKI IKEMAN
Postmedia Network

Temperatures may be above the seasonal norm, but water temperatures are still cold.

It's something experts say to keep in mind this season if you're looking to participate in a polar bear dip.

Brock professor and Canada Research Chair Stephen Cheung said that while this year's weather will make the waiting around before and after a dip more pleasant than usual, people should still be aware of the cold body shock symptoms so they don't panic when they take the plunge.

"What happens for most people when they jump in, is you're going to end up having your heart rate go very high very rapidly and it's very difficult to control your breathing and you end up hyperventilating," Cheung said.

Though that might sound frightening, he added that it's generally a safe activity for most people.

"The big danger that can come from it is if you are not ready or not experience or not knowing that this can happen and you can start to panic," he said.

"For the vast majority of people I would say it's a safe and fun thing to do."

But there are exceptions. Cheung said that people with existing heart conditions, hypertension and high blood pressure especially should steer clear of the activity.

Cheung also said that the right location can decrease the possibility of incidental dangers.

"The venue I would really recommend against is if you're up at the cottage and you decide to cut a hole in the ice and jump in that can be very dangerous," he said.

Cheung said that when your body starts to go into shock it can be very difficult to get yourself out of the water, especially if you are in a hole in the ice.

"The safest bet is to go to organized polar bear dips."

The Penguin Club hosted its annual dip into Niagara's River in Niagara-on-the-Lake on Boxing Day.

The annual Crystal Beach Polar Bear Dip is Saturday, Jan. 9, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. with the big dip taking place at 1 p.m. at Bal Harbour Beach.

■ I'VE BEEN THINKING

Tomorrow is a brand new day

PASTOR GARY TOMIUCK

Welland Christian Congregation Church

I've been thinking about Christmas and the new year as the timing of this article falls between these two events.

The fact that it had not been a white Christmas suited the majority of people, although some would have liked a little dusting of snow to prettify the occasion. After which the hot sun can absorb it until it is no more.

That can be a parallel for people who profess faith in Christ but who do not possess the Holy Spirit and thus do not belong to Him. They act like Christians, use the same Christian-ese but their profession is only superficial. Either the deceitfulness of riches or the fire of affliction melts away like snow proving that they went away from us for they were not of us.

Others who have sincerely repented of their sins and have received Jesus as their own personal Lord and Saviour have God's promise that "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (see Isaiah 1:18). In that sense this can become

the whitest Christmas possible for anyone. And the impossibility of the supernatural conception of the Christ-Child became easy for the one of whom the angels said "for nothing is impossible with God" (Lk 1:37). People spend billions of dollars in search for signals from extra terrestrial life, looking for UFOs where as Christians celebrate the coming down of an IBB an "identified baby boy."

The Lord came down in ultimate humility and condescension as He left the highest heavens-to planet earth-to a hamlet named Bethlehem — to a peasant virgin named Mary — becoming a cell-out of her womb placed in a feeding trough for animals (such love). But some 30-plus years later a sword would pierce Mary's heart as that tender scalp that was soothed with oil would be soaked in blood as those terrible thorns were driven into it (such love), and those baby feet that kicked joyfully would grow and be nailed to that cruel cross (such love). The sinless Son taking our deserved wrath upon Himself.

Yet upon death rising from the dead just as He said He would. And now from going down, down, down, He was raised up, up,

up once again into the highest heavens to resume His rightful place as the complete conqueror of death, king of kings and lord of lords (such love).

This is the reason that you cannot separate the Lord's birth, death and resurrection from each other. Though different they are all of a piece. His birth and ministry were lived in the shadow of the cross. The empty cross and the empty grave guarantees the rock solid promise that our Lord will also raise believers down from the grave and up into the highest heavens with Him forever.

With Mary in her magnificent Christians should rejoice daily in God their Saviour. With Zechariah's Benedicite (blessed) We make this song our own, it is the song of our salvation, by saying and singing "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for He has visited and redeemed His people" (Lk 1:68-69). With the angels in their glory we join in praising God for the glad tidings with great joy (Lk 2:20). Then finally we join with Simeon in his Nunc Dimittis — we can depart this world in peace having spiritually seen our Saviour.

Tomorrow is brand new year, we look back upon last year and reflect upon our

lives with its joys and sorrows, it's tribulations and celebrations and we look ahead to a brand new year before us with its questions and uncertainties.

Our answers and our certainties are found in God alone who is the answer and who is in complete control of the world contrary to how it may appear.

In the meantime, we live in the present in the dash between our birthday and our death day. We should not adopt the philosophy that we are here for a good time and not a long time. Take spiritual inventory of your life. Your soul is eternal. Where will you spend eternity? With the Lord or without Him. Some of you may pass on this year. Are you ready to meet the Lord? Are you a Christian? Are you not sure?

You can be by simply acknowledging that you are a sinner and that Christ is the Saviour and whose birth at Christmas and whose resurrection at Easter provides hope for the hopeless and help for the helpless.

Receive that free yet costly gift now and you will have that brand new birth in this brand new year.

Happy new year to all.

Shipwrecks — Carita

SKIP GILLHAM
For Postmedia Network

HANDOUT/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Carita is pictured in the St. Lawrence Seaway in this Nov. 30, 1975, photo by Rene Beauchamp.

The Swedish vessel *Carita* was wrecked after leaving the Great Lakes.

The 102.10-metre-long cargo ship had taken on a load of oats and peas at Thunder Bay and was headed for Port au Spain, on the West Indies island of Trinidad, when it suffered a mechanical breakdown on Dec. 16, 1975.

Two days later, *Carita* drifted ashore at Money Point, Cape Breton Island, and had to be abandoned by the crew. The relentless pounding of the waves on the stranded ship broke the hull into four pieces before any plan for salvage could be undertaken.

Carita had been built at Abo, Finland, in 1966 and first sailed as *Ingrid Gorthon*. It was sold and renamed *Carita* on Sept. 2, 1975, but had only a short career under this name. There are still visible remains of the ship resting at the location of it being wrecked 40 years ago this month.

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For further information, contact Greg Fumming.

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LOCAL NEWS

IN BRIEF

What's open and closed on Jan. 1

Some stores will cut short normal business hours on New Year's Eve and most stores and services will be closed

for New Year's Day. LCBO and Beer Store outlets will be open until 6 p.m. New Year's Eve and closed New Year's Day. Most major retailers and banks will be closed Friday.

Friday's collection of garbage, recycling and organic waste will instead be on Saturday. Christmas tree pickup is on Saturday, Jan. 9, starting 7 a.m.

Most Niagara Region offices and facilities will be closed today and Friday.

Town of Pelham offices close at noon Thursday and reopen Monday.

The Tribune is not publishing a newspaper on New Year's Day. Visit www.wellandtribune.ca for the latest news during the holidays.

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Heather Price

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HOLIDAY CHANGES IN WASTE COLLECTION

Garbage, recycling and Green Bin collection will be deferred by one day on Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

Regular Waste Collection Day

Changed to:

Friday (Dec. 25)

Saturday (Dec. 26)

Friday (Jan. 1)

Saturday (Jan. 2)



HOLIDAY GARBAGE EXEMPTIONS

In the week following Christmas (Dec. 26, 28, 29, 30, 31), residents may place double their regular weekly garbage limit to the curb on their collection day.



CHRISTMASTREE COLLECTION

- Saturday, Jan. 9, 2016 ONLY
- Christmas trees must be at the curb by 7 a.m.
- Remove all ornaments and decorations
- Christmas trees wrapped in plastic or buried in snow will not be collected. No artificial trees.



Niagara  Region

niagararegion.ca/waste
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■ **NEW YEAR'S EVE:** Hotel rooms in tourist district to be booked solid despite no concert broadcast

Niagara Falls 'place to be' even without live TV

RAY SPITERI
Postmedia Network

Hotel rooms will be booked solid on New Year's Eve even though the likes of Keith Urban or Demi Lovato won't be on stage in Queen Victoria Park, tourism officials say.

"New Year's Eve will still be one of the busiest nights of the year at Fallsview Casino and Casino Niagara," said Niagara Casinos spokesman Greg Medulun. "Our hotel is fully booked and we expect about 75,000 people to come and go from the two casinos by the time midnight rolls around."

Niagara Falls Tourism chairman Wayne Thomson acknowledged rates are "always good for the operators" on New Year's Eve,

but having a live televised show acts as an added incentive.

"New Year's Eve in Niagara Falls is the place to be."

Thomson also works for the Fallsview Group, which operates a handful of hotels in the busy tourism district.

He said even when Global broadcast live from Niagara Falls for the past six years — and all-star calibre talent performed — many who packed Queen Victoria Park drove home after the show.

Thomson said many of the people who stayed at hotels right in the tourist area for the night were the ones who also enjoyed other forms of entertainment, which won't change this year.

He said the benefit of having live TV coverage across Canada

on New Year's Eve wasn't necessarily for that night, but for future marketing as a tourist destination.

"Believe me, all the hotel rooms will be filled. It will be an extremely busy New Year's Eve as it always is. Everybody is planning for it."

Tom Cochrane, former Sixx singer Dennis DeYoung and former Great Big Sea singer Alan Doyle will all play the annual free concert in Queen Victoria Park. In mid-December, Sarah Vazquez, vice-president of business development and marketing with Canadian Niagara Hotels, said they were close to selling out their 2,200 rooms at six hotels in Niagara Falls.

"Niagara Falls is a first-class



MIKE ORBATISTA/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Niagara Falls hotels are still expected to be booked solid, even though there won't be a live television broadcast of this year's New Year's Eve concert at Queen Victoria Park.

destination and is top of mind for so many people, especially on New Year's Eve."

Vazquez said Canadian Niagara Hotels is not seeing a decline in rates because this year's concert won't be on live television.

"It's trending as it should be," she said referring to the rates.

"And there's so much more that Niagara Falls offers, too. You have other entertainment, the casino, great dining and great hotels."

Medulun said it's "no secret" New Year's Eve in Niagara Falls has established itself during the years as "iconic and a must-do experience" for locals and tourists.

"Local tourism stakeholders, including the casino, the Parks and the city, have invested significant dollars into the event this year, and while it will not be tele-

vised, the free live concert still promises to be a hot spot for fun and a great place to ring in the new year."

Mayor Jim Diodati said even with no live televised broadcast, the city still has the great attraction that is the Falls itself. That keeps the Honeymoon Capital at the top of the bucket list for many people around the world.

And he said while hotel rooms right around the falls may be booked solid, visitors will still be able to find rooms in the city.

"The Fallsview area is always the first to go, but there will be lots of rooms available," said Diodati. "We have a significant amount of bed and breakfasts, and we'll have great transportation, even after midnight, to get people around."

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■ MUSIC



Marc Jordan plays the new Here! Here! Niagara Music Series at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre Jan. 3.

Musicians team up for new PAC series

A new concert series at FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre will have local musicians sharing the stage with international artists.

The Here! Here! Niagara Music Series kicks off Jan. 3 with house band The Mark Lalama Trio playing with Juno-winning singer/songwriter Marc Jordan and St. Catharines performer Whitney Pea.

Performing arts centre marketing manager Sara Palmieri says each show will be an eclectic mix of songs and storytelling. "Think Levon Helm's *Midnight Rambles* meets Elvis Costello's *Spectacle*."

The Mark Lalama Trio consists of Niagara musicians Mark Lalama, Davide DiRenzo and Rich Moore.

Jordan, husband of Canadian singer Amy Sky, has written songs for Rod Stewart, Cher, Joe Cocker and Josh Groban.

The series continues Feb. 14 with Kevin Breit and Beth Moore, March 13 with Suzie Vinnick and Joe Lapinski, and April 3 with Ian Thomas and an artist to be announced.

Tickets are \$35 per show, or \$100 for all four. For more information, visit www.firstontariopac.ca.

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■ THEATRE



LISA HORNER



NORM FOSTER

Foster Festival adds familiar faces to casting

JOHN LAW
Postmedia Network

More casting has been announced for the inaugural season of The Foster Festival, and the names will be familiar to Shaw Festival audiences.

Marla McLean, Helen Taylor and Lisa Horner, who have all performed at the Niagara-on-the-Lake company in recent seasons, have been added to the cast of *Halfway to the North Pole*, the final show of The Foster Festival season.

The new company is devoted to the works of Canadian author Norm Foster, and promises one world premiere each season.

Foster himself will join artistic director Patricia Vanstone on stage for *On a First Name Basis* to open the season in June.

Niagara actors Melanie Janzen and Jamie Williams will star in the second show of the season, *Here on the Flight Path*, opening in July.

Halfway to the North Pole, the first season's world premiere, opens in August.

All shows will be performed at FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre in St. Catharines. Tickets are available at the box office or by phoning 1-855-515-0722. Vanstone has also announced Meridian Credit Union as the founding sponsor for the company's first season.



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■ HEALTH

'Tis the season to donate blood

MATTHEW ALLEN

Special to Postmedia Network
Walter Adamska has many reasons to donate blood. The resource centre representative for Niagara Health Service watched his grand-

father undergo quadruple bypass surgery, and realized how important it was for blood to be made available. "People need it," Adamska said last Thursday. "You can tell when they

do the commercials that it's really, truly needed. And it's Dec. 24, so what better day to do it?" He was one of approximately 20 NHS employees who went to Welland Community Well-

ness Complex to donate blood on Christmas Eve.

It's part of the organization's Wrap It Up Red campaign, through which the NHS is partnered with Canadian Blood Services and encourag-

ing its staff to donate over the holidays and throughout the year.

Donors were greeted by cheerful Christmas music and the warm smiles of volunteers from the wellness centre as they arrived.

Most, like Adamska, had a story to tell.

Jeff Eckhardt has been a facility supervisor and maintenance planner for the NHS for nearly 35 years. He hasn't donated blood since 1999, but says that a combination of the NHS's push to bring its employees out and some family encouragement brought him back.

"Just the promotion that the NHS did for this campaign made me want to jump on board," he said. "Also, my son, Brian, is a regular donor, and he's inspired me, too."

Dave Corbett has been a clinical manager with the Welland hospital emergency department for four years, and has seen the need for more donations first-hand.

He recounted seeing trauma patients come into the ER who required 40 units of blood to stay alive.

"Not every individual is going to need that amount," Corbett said. "But if it's one of your loved ones and they come in, you want to make sure that every hospital has that product on hand."

Monica Hlywka has spearheaded the campaign for the NHS and says that even though health-care professionals tend to people's needs already, there's always more that can be done to contribute.

"As an organization in health care we see the need more than anyone else," said Hlywka. "So it's a way for us to solicit to our family and the NHS to say, 'Hey let's all do our part even though we are health-care givers and giving already lets go one more step and donate blood.'"

More than 125,000 appointments to give blood needed to be filled this December. These units are required for hospital patients who are getting surgery, require treatment or need blood transfusions.

"If nobody donates and we don't replenish those stores then those people might not get the treatments they need," said Hlywka.

Underground Transmission Line – Notice of Road Closure Mountainview Road

For the Niagara Region Wind Project, FWRN

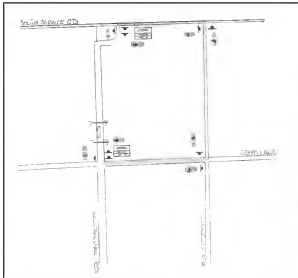
Project Name
Project Location
Notice Dated At

Niagara Region Wind Project (the "Project")
Within the Townships of West Lincoln and Wainfleet and the Town of Lincoln in the Niagara Region and Haldimand County in Southern Ontario
Haldimand County and Niagara Region, the 11th of January 2016.

Niagara Region Wind Corporation, now FWRN LP (the "Proponent"), are engaging in a renewable energy project for which a Renewable Energy Approval ("REA") was issued by the Ministry of the Environment (now the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change) on November 21, 2014.

Project Description

The Project is located within the Townships of West Lincoln and Wainfleet and the Town of Lincoln in the Niagara Region and Haldimand County in Southern Ontario. The Project will consist of 77 wind turbine generators, step-up transformer, electrical collector lines, a transmission line, two transformer substations, turbine access roads and construction staging areas. The Project will have a total maximum nameplate capacity of up to 230 MW.



Underground Transmission Line – Road Closure

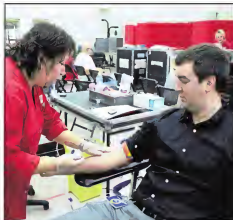
Vault and duct bank installations, along with underground trenching will begin on Mountainview Road starting Jan. 11th, 2016. The road closure would be from: Jan. 11th to 16th. Detours for this road closure are: South Service Road to Lincoln Avenue to Greenlane (see diagram above). Please note that public services (i.e. mail delivery, garbage pick-up, school buses, etc.) may be disrupted during this time.

If you have any obstructions in the right-of-way near your property (e.g. fences, private gas lines, gardens, trees, electrical lines), please contact Shiloh Berriman (contact information below).

Project Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns throughout the Project's construction phase, please do not hesitate to contact us at:

| NIAGARA REGION WIND PROJECT CONTACT | GENERAL PROJECT INFORMATION |
|--|---|
| Shiloh Berriman Email: shiloh.berriman@nrcnrc.com Cell: 289-683-2563 | General Number: 819-363-6491 Toll Free: 1-844-363-6491 Project email: info@nrwc.ca Project website: www.nrwc.ca |



MATTHEW ALLEN/PHOTO

Dave Corbett and nurse Maria Goritsas at the Canada Blood Service Clinic in Welland Thursday.

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■ HEALTH



MIKE ORBATZ/ST. POSTMEDIA NETWORK

To deal with an increased number of patients during the holiday season and winter months, the Niagara Health System has partnered with other health-care agencies to help the public better understand their options if they require medical attention. From left are registered nurses Lisa Hart and Laura Blakely, along with Cheryl Lyons, clinical manager of the emergency department at Greater Niagara General Hospital.

People urged to choose appropriate level of care

RAY SPITERI

Postmedia Network

Emergency rooms are usually busy places, especially during the holiday season and winter months.

To deal with the expected annual surge of patients, Niagara Health System, Hotel Dieu Shaver Health and Rehabilitation Centre and Niagara Region Public Health are working together to help the public understand the most appropriate health-care options available to them if they require medical attention for flu or other illnesses.

"Every year it's no surprise that Christmas comes, winter comes ... and we see a surge in volume in our emergency departments and urgent-care centres," said Derek McNally, executive vice-president of clinical services for the NHS.

There are instances where the best place for an ill patient to go is not an emergency department, which may have a long wait time, but rather an urgent-care centre, which may have a shorter wait time.

"This initiative will go a long way to ensuring people in the community know their options in order to get the right level of care," said McNally.

In non-emergency situations, patients are encouraged to visit their family doctor, nurse practitioner or urgent-care centre.

Other options include walk-in clinics; calling Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 for advice and information from a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week; visiting Health Care Options Ontario at ontario.ca/healthcareoptions to search for a health-care provider near you; or by calling 211 for services about health care in Niagara.

For medical emergencies, patients should call 911 immediately or go to the nearest emergency department.

Emergency department teams treat patients who call 911 and arrive by ambulance. They also treat walk-in patients for

emergencies such as broken bones, dizziness, complications of pregnancy, serious illness, serious injury and mental-health issues.

Patients should go to an urgent-care centre for issues such as minor abdominal pain (nausea, vomiting); ear, nose, throat and eye problems; cuts that may need stitches; sprains, strains, sports injuries; minor asthma attacks or allergic reactions and minor mental-health issues.

The NHS has posted information about general health-care options and regularly updates wait times on its website, niagarahealth.on.ca/en/waiting-times.

Information about the flu can be found at niagarahealth.on.ca/health.

McNally said the partnership with Hotel Dieu and public health came about thanks to a desire to see more region-wide planning for the coming winter months, rather than the hospitals and public health doing their own thing.

Jane Ruffano, chief executive officer of Hotel Dieu, said they are pleased to collaborate with the NHS and public health to help residents make informed decisions about their health care.

"We are continually working towards partnerships that deliver on a shared commitment to improve the quality of patient care and access across the Niagara community," she said.

Dr. Mustafa Hirji, associate medical officer of health for Niagara Region Public Health, said to prevent getting sick this winter, residents are encouraged to get the flu shot. They should also wash their hands regularly, and cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing.

"When illness does strike, we can reduce its spread by staying home from school or work, and not visiting friends or family in the hospital or long-term care homes," he said.

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BEFORE




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■ EMPLOYMENT

Don't wait to apply for summer job funding program

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

There's a limited time to apply for a program that will help small businesses bring in some extra help this summer, while providing more summer jobs for students.

Niagara Centre MP Vance Badawey is urging local businesses to take advantage of the Canada Summer Jobs program as soon as possible.

"This is huge," Badawey said.

He said in addition to providing summer job opportunities for students from 15 to 30 years of age who are planning to return to their studies, the program "also gives businesses the opportunity to offset their bottom line by getting federal dollars."

The funding is for non-profit corporations, public sector employers as well as small businesses with fewer than 50 workers.

Application deadline is Feb. 26, and funding will be available to successful applicants allowing them to hire students by May.

It's imperative that the people who want to get involved in this program get those applications in now, because the deadline is coming up," Badawey said. "That's a critical program for people to know about both

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Canada's youth unemployment rate is currently more than 13 per cent; for students returning to school, it's more than 16 per cent.

In comparison, the national unemployment rate for people 25 and older is about six per cent.

in the public sector, as well as the private sector."

The program provides non-profit organizations with up to 100 per cent of the costs of hiring students, while public-sector employers and small businesses can receive up to 50 per cent of the costs.

Additional funding may be provided for hiring students with disabilities of up to \$3,000 per student, to pay for any special tools or adaptations required by the worker.

A media release about the program said its focus will be on summer jobs that are important to local communities, such as organizing special sporting or cultural events.

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CALNEWS

■ **BOXING DAY:** Seaway Mall sees steady stream of shoppers

Bargain hunting in season

FRANKI IKEMAN
Postmedia Network

There were no massive lines or fights for coveted parking spots at Seaway Mall Saturday.

The Boxing Day frenzy didn't seem to hit the Welland shopping centre with the force neighbouring Niagara municipalities felt, but the stream was fairly steady throughout the day.

A flow of shoppers, rather than hoards of holiday deal hunters, may not have been exciting for some retailers, but for the Welland and District Humane Society it meant a steady stream of people through the doors at the Cat Adoption Centre.

As of mid-day, one black cat had found its forever home and five were left.

Volunteer Mike Kucman said even one adoption in a day is a good day, adding some days no cats are adopted.

"It's nice seeing cats get out the door," he said.

Kucman said that two weeks ago, the shelter had 30 cats in, but that the centre has been having "good week after good week."

And although some people were getting some belated holiday shopping in Saturday, Kucman said that's not what they're looking for in homes for cats.

"We don't want to adopt cats out as gifts, because then they might come back," he said.

Kucman said he hopes to see the remaining five cats find their forever homes soon, saying he hopes people won't shy away from older and black cats.

One retailer doing well with the steady foot traffic was Vince's European Deli, where Norm Gauthier was working at the deli's stand.

He said Boxing Day was "not bad" but before Christmas was much busier.

"We had little spurts where it got a little busy but then it would be back to normal," Gauthier said.

The Niagara Falls-based company has been setting up shop for the holiday season at Seaway Mall for five years. Normally, they pack up and leave after New Year's, but because business has been so good they are staying until March.

"This year my boss said we're staying until March. We're very popular here at the mall," he said.

After closing on Christmas Day, malls and stores reopened to a sea of customers Saturday morning.

In Niagara Falls, parking was hard to come by at the outlet mall on Lundy's Lane early Saturday afternoon.

Parking lots at Niagara Square and the Walmart plaza in Niagara Falls were packed with vehicles, however, open spots could be found.

"This is the second mall we came to," said Niagara Falls resident Lisa Hawken, moments after finding a parking spot at Canada One Factory Outlets. "The first one (Outlet Collection at Niagara in Niagara-on-the-Lake), we couldn't even get a spot. It's crazy."

Hal Hamilton stayed outside while his wife was inside looking for Boxing Day bargains.

"I'm just out for the walk," said Hamilton, who was born and raised in Niagara Falls, but who now lives in Ottawa.

"We're here visiting family and we just wanted to go for a walk. This was one place we went. I don't go into the stores or anything."

Elsewhere in the region, the parking lot at the Pen Centre in St. Catharines was flush with vehicles, however, sections of open spots were visible. That mall's "Boxing Week Sale" started on Saturday, with up to 75 per cent off at select stores and merchandise.

In north St. Catharines, Costco and Fairview Mall parking lots and ring roads were steady, but flowing well by late morning Saturday.

Carly Rupic, a spokeswoman for Outlet Collection at Niagara owner Ivanhoe Cambridge, said bigger Boxing Day crowds are expected to be bigger at that complex in Niagara-on-the-Lake than last year.

"This, judging by the huge increase we saw in Black Friday traffic and the strong holiday season we have had so far," said Rupic.

"The beautiful weather has also been a great help to us and hopefully it will hold up for Boxing Day to bring in even more shoppers."

Jen Cherry, general manager of Best Buy on Vanickie Road in St. Catharines, was preparing for the shopping sale frenzy by 4 a.m.

As per usual, some shoppers started lining up outside the store after midnight, with prospective shoppers thronging outside by 6 a.m.'s start.

"As of that opening, it was one of the biggest lineups I've seen," said Cherry, who also noted this year's closing of Canada's Future Shops, including the one in Niagara Falls, as a possible factor for drawing in more people. "The lineup when we opened was wrapped around the store."

—with files from Don Fraser and Ray Spitzer,
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■ HARVEST

Grape crop stages late season comeback

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network
It had been a second bru-

tal winter, one most unkind to vineyards.
During 2014, low temperatures in some parts of the

region dipped below -20°C through the worst of the freeze-up.
Last winter provided

a repeat of those wintery extremes.
Earlier this year, Niagara grape grower Bill George

feared the worst.

"In January and February I didn't think we would have a crop at all, given temperatures were seeing through the winter," said George. "But it did turn out to be somewhat better than we expected."

Numbers continue to be down following two hard winters, but Ontario's grape growers have still topped last year's harvest.

Grape Growers of Ontario reported its vineyards in the 2015 growing season have produced 52,888 tonnes of grapes with farm gate value of \$62.38 million, as of Dec. 1.

That tonnage compares to 52,716 from the 2014 harvest that followed a more serious winter kill that hammered some vineyards.

In comparison, 2013's harvest was a record bumper crop at 80,548 tonnes, according to the Grape Growers.

Niagara produces 92 per cent of a provincial grape tonnage that amounts to 69 per cent of the Canadian total.

"There's still a big gap between a normalized crop of around 67,000 tonnes (or more) we should have," said George, who is also chair of the Grape Growers. "So I think the growers are feeling the impact of the last two winters."

Debbie Zimmerman, Grape Growers' CEO, said tonnages were up with some varieties like Merlot, "where we thought we'd be in a situation where we'd be a lot worse ... it was one of the varieties where

we thought there would be a problem."

"So some growers actually had a good year, compared to other growers who were definitely down anywhere to about 25 per cent."

"There was varying tonnages all around us," Zimmerman added.

She said warm days in August and September also helped with the grapes, which are showing decent sugar counts — a big measure of quality.

Other area tender fruit did not fare badly this year, said Kevin Kerr, a research associate with the Brock University Cold Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute.

"Stone fruits had really good cropping this year, and most of the trees come through pretty well," said Kerr, who is also an independent grape and tender-fruit crop consultant.

"We avoided a couple of cold (frost kill) calls with crops and the season started really early. We got out of the gate fast this year."

Fruit quality was also decent, said Kerr.

"And on the grape side, the yields were actually higher than expected coming out of that winter," he said.

"Those yields actually came out pretty good ... September and October saved our bacon, as we had such a glorious fall."

don.fraser@sunmedia.ca
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